3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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threads of the people together, but now a youthful warrior was about to accomplish that."[11]

The Sun Dance, as it was worked out for the occasion by the Comanches, was a much simplified version of the elaborate complex that existed among the Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Kiowas. The Comanches had been interested spectators of Kiowa Sun Dances for some seventy-five years, and they had from time to time watched the Cheyenne spectacle in the years following the making of the peace in 1840. They were familiar enough with the external forms of the dance.

Certain features of the social structure that supported the Cheyenne and Kiowa dances were lacking in the cultural equipment of the Comanches, but this did not bother them. They were always a highly adaptable people and not in the least form-bound. If they had no military societies to police the camp and the dance, as did their neighbors, that was quite all right with them. They did not use police on the buffalo hunt—and they could do without them here. The fact that a little fetish doll was essential to the Kiowas in their form of the dance did not worry the Comanches, who had no such doll. They made no effort to procure a Sun Dance doll; they simply did without one. That the Cheyennes possessed trained Sun Dance priests, each of whom owned an inherited Sun Dance Medicine Bundle, without which no man could direct a Sun Dance, was of no moment. A respected shaman could direct the ceremony.

What was wanted was the Sun Dance—an invocation of the Great Power. The will and the general form of the dance would achieve the goal. Comanche thinking was running in the Comanche way.

The Comanche Sun Dance lodge had the traditional forked center pole surrounded by a circular wall of twelve upright posts, from each of which a streamer ran to the crotch of the center pole. The wall, with an opening between the two easternmost poles, was filled in with brush. Four ceremonial days were used to gather the materials and prepare the lodge.

The common Plains Indian practice of treating the tree that was to yield the center pole as though it were an enemy—i.e., "scouting" for it and counting coup upon it—was not done by the Comanches. They did, however, choose an honored, virtuous woman to do the

[11] Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement*, 374.

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and the erection of the lodge and the last four to the dance proper. When the medicine man had selected a place for the dance, invitations were sent out to the various bands. Informants knew of no formality attending this. The bands moved to the place by easy stages, always making four over night halts en route. The camp was pitched in a semi-circle about the site chosen for the lodge. The members of each band camped together, but the bands had no regular order in the circle.

When the camp has assembled, gathering of materials for the lodge was begun. Cottonwood was used for the posts and brush covering and either cottonwood or cedar for the screen inside the lodge. Men and women went out together to cut the smaller posts and brush. They wore wreaths of sage and joked and sang. When the materials had been cut they were tied to ropes and hauled back by groups of men on foot. These men usually halted four times on their way back to rest and sing.

The cutting and transportation of the center pole was left until the last. There seems to have been no ceremony attending its selection. It was cut, in various instances, by a virtuous Comanche woman (i.e., one who had always been faithful to her husband), a virtuous captive woman, and a captive man who had a number of war deeds to his credit. Although informants could give no explanation of these selections, the use of captives for this important office probably reflects their importance in the social and economic life of the tribe. The Comanche captives, who were mostly Mexicans, tended the horse herds and practiced most of the specialized industries such as gun repairing and saddle making. They were also encouraged to accompany their masters on war parties and, if brave fighters, could rise to any position open to a full blood. The captive woman who was faithful to her master or the captive man who had won war honors had behaved in a commendable way and deserved to be honored by the whole society.

The center pole itself was a tree trunk about fourteen feet long and one foot in diameter with a fork at the upper end. After it had been felled and peeled, it was carried bodily to the site of the lodge, twenty-five or thirty men bearing it by means of ropes passed under it. The bearers were changed frequently so that everyone would have a chance to help. Four stops were always made en route.

The construction of the lodge was never begun until all the materials were on the spot. The center pole was erected first, being planted in a hole two to three feet deep. The upper end was supported and guided by means of a forked sapling. Three unsuccessful attempts were made to lift it, it being set on the fourth attempt. At each attempt the medicine man blew

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396 on his whistle of eagle bone. After the center pole had been set, the outer
346 circle of short posts and stringers was erected and rafters run from these to the fork in the center pole. In one case the entire lodge was then covered with cottonwood brush. In another only the walls were filled in with brush, the roof being left open. A single opening was left on the east side to serve as a door. Across the west side of the lodge a row of small cedar trees or cottonwood branches was set up, screening off an alcove into which the dancers could retire to rest and sleep.

While the lodge was being constructed, hunters were sent out to kill a
[532] three year old buffalo bull. At the dance where the lodge was fully roofed, the head and fore quarters of this animal were skinned and the skin stuffed with willow twigs, making a sort of manikin. This was set on top of the lodge with its head toward the east. In the dance where the open lodge was used the skin was simply placed in the fork of the center pole. During the
[786] time that the materials were being collected and the lodge erected ordinary rules of conduct were relaxed and there was a good deal of sexual license, although this apparently did not apply to close relatives.

796 When the lodge was finished or nearly finished, four or five clowns ap-
522 peared. The number of these performers does not seem to have been fixed
292 and anyone could adopt the rôle who wished. These clowns wore conical
536 helmets of willow twigs with the leaves and bark left on, the lower edges of the helmets coming down over their shoulders. They carried circular shields roughly woven of split willows, also with the leaves and bark, and long swabs or clubs made from willow saplings with the leafy twigs at their ends woven into a ball. They had large false noses of mud and their whole bodies, equipment and even their ponies were liberally daubed with mud. They road into camp at a gallop, chasing the people and dogs, striking anyone they could catch with their mud soaked swabs, and performing a variety of amusing antics. Those who were struck could not take offence, but people who did not want to take part in the fun would run into the lodges, where the mounted men could not reach them.

796 After the completion of the lodge, and probably after the clown's in-
541 vasion, there was a sham battle. While the finishing touches were being put to the lodge, some of the men had retired to the neighboring creek bottom and built a rough enclosure there, "like a rail fence." In this they established themselves, sometimes having women and children with them. A man who had served as a scout in actual combat came out from the main camp, located this "fort," and returned to report the presence of an enemy. All the warriors in camp then donned their full regalia and went out to attack it, followed by a crowd of spectators. During the attack each man reenacted

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796 535 dancers, but this was rarely the case since the buffalo were older men of established reputation while the dancers were usually young.

796 535 513 346 Early on this same morning the wives of the dancers, or, if they were unmarried, any of their close female relatives, made beds for them in the screened alcove at the western side of the lodge. These beds consisted of heaps of sage with robes over them. A large rounded heap of moist sand was also built. When the dancers were exhausted they would retire behind the screen and throw themselves upon this so that they would be revived by its dampness and coolness. After the beds had been made and the sand heap built no one was allowed behind the screen except the medicine man and the actual dancers.

796 535 783 515 The crier warned everyone who wished to attend the dance to bathe that morning. The dancers also bathed. This was a common preliminary to seeking to establish relations with the supernatural, as when a man was going to a medicine man's grave to get power from his ghost. It was a form of purification or consecration, although in this case it was not attended by any ceremony.

796 535 [534] After the noon meal the people went into the lodge and the dance began. The drummers, old men who also led in the singing, seated themselves near the door or about the fire place. Unfortunately, the location of the fire place in the lodge was not ascertained. They had a large circular drum or drums of the sort used in ordinary dances. These drums were beaten by several men simultaneously. They also carried rattles which apparently could be of any sort. The spectators, both men and women, seated themselves around the sides of the lodge three or four deep.

796 535 302 [293] While the audience and orchestra were taking their places, the dancers went behind the screen with the medicine man and painted themselves. Often they helped to paint each other. This painting seems to have been rather varied. In the ceremony in which the roofless lodge was used all the dancers painted solid yellow. In that with the closed lodge each dancer was painted differently and there was a variety of colors and designs. All informants agreed that, although the paint was renewed each morning of the ceremony, each man wore the same designs throughout. The dancers were stripped to breech clout and moccasins and carried no paraphernalia except their eagle bone whistles. None of these were seen, but they are described as identical with those used by other Plains tribes in the Sun Dance.

796 535 They were usually eight to twelve dancers. When they first emerged from behind the screen they danced with their arms stretched toward the sun, but as they became exhausted they dropped their arms and merely moved their shoulders with a shrugging motion, stamping at the same

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796 and for the spectators to eat. This continued for three days. All the people
535 had to bathe every morning before entering the lodge.

796 The dancers underwent no torture other than exhaustion and abstain-
535 ence from food and drink. Even the abstinence was not complete. Dancers
785 were allowed to chew slippery elm bark during the rest periods, also to drink the mucilaginous fluid obtained by scraping the inside of strips of this bark. They were allowed to eat the dried wild plums which would be found lying on the ground under plum bushes at this season of the year and possibly other dried fruits as well.

796 The condition of the dancers was closely watched and if it seemed that
535 any dancer would be unable to last out the full period his father would
783 arrange for his release. The father went to the medicine man and without making him the formal smoke offering required when his aid was asked in other matters, gave him a gift and asked that the young man be excused. If the medicine man accepted the gift, the young man was told to go behind the screen, take up his bed and leave. His father went with him from the lodge to the creek, where the young man washed his mouth out, dived in four times against the current and then washed his mouth again. After this he was free to go home. Diving four times against the current was also a part of the ritual used in relinquishing any supernatural power which had become burdensome. Sometimes another man would take the place of the one who had been released and finish the dance for him, but informants did not know how this was arranged. Actually, such releases were very infre-
[558] quent, as they were considered disgraceful.

796 The dance ended at midnight on the fourth day. Informants were not
535 sure whether the dancers underwent any ceremony of secularization at the end of the ceremony. The next morning camp was broken and the various bands moved back to their own ranges. Four over night halts had to be made on the return trip. Even the band in whose territory the dance had been held would move away, leaving the lodge with its offerings deserted. Shortly after the dance a series of small feasts would be given, one in honor of each dancer. To these feasts only the dancer, his relatives, the medicine man, and the old men of the Sun Dance orchestra would be invited.

● [346] Very little regarding the symbolism or purpose of the dance is remembered at the present time. The whole lodge is said to have represented an eagle's nest while the buffalo manikin or pelt placed on top of the center pole is said to have been food for the eagle. In their movements and whistling the dancers were supposed to be imitating young eagles not yet able to fly.